



MEDIA ADVISORY

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GOVERNOR PROCLAIMS JUNE 25-JULY 1 DEAF-BLIND AWARENESS WEEK *ACHIEVING EXCEPTIONAL CAREERS FOCUS OF WEEK*

NASHVILLE, TENN.— Governor Phil Bredesen has proclaimed June 25-July 1 “Helen Keller Deaf Blind Awareness Week” to recognize the skills and abilities that individuals with dual sensory loss share. The week falls on the birthday of Helen Keller, one of the most accomplished, respected and renowned deaf-blind Americans.

The focus of Deaf-Blind Awareness Week is Achieving Exceptional Careers. The Department of Human Services’ Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) works with dozens of deaf-blind clients each year, helping them become self-sufficient through job training and counseling, orientation and mobility services, and instruction in communication skills, such as Braille and sign language.

“Deaf-blindness is one of the most severe of all disabilities,” said Governor Bredesen. “It is important for employers to realize that persons with this and other disabilities can and must be an important contributor to our workforce.”

Tennessee is striving to enhance the lives of individuals who are deaf-blind by providing options for housing and access to training and employment so that each individual may live in their own home with whatever supports are needed. The DRS works with deaf-blind clients to assist them in the pursuit of training and employment of their choosing.

An effort is underway in Tennessee and across the nation to recruit Support Services Providers (SSPs) to help deaf-blind individuals live more enjoyable lives. The SSPs are volunteers who facilitate communication or link the deaf-blind with interpreters. They also function as sighted guides to the deaf-blind person, provide information about the person’s surroundings, and assist them with transportation and access to functions and activities within the community.

The most recent U.S. census shows there are approximately 4,000 Tennesseans who are deaf-blind. These numbers include elderly citizens who are losing their vision and hearing. Each state keeps a registry of individuals who are deaf-blind. In Tennessee, the registry shows that approximately 250 children under 21 years old and more than 500 adults are deaf-blind.

For more information on deaf-blind services through DHS, visit

www.state.tn.us/humanserv/rehabilitation.htm

For more information about deaf-blindness, or to assist as an SSP, contact Cathy Steger at

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